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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: IF ACCREDITATION IS THIS DISORGANIZED...

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. INEC's April 10-11 Abuja accreditation briefing for international and domestic observers, clearly thrown together with little or no preparation, provided few answers and raised more doubt as to INEC's organizational capabilities. Iwu and other INEC officials, while offering little concrete information in their presentations, instead took the opportunity to chastise observers for not understanding the "context of Nigeria" and caution that observers are permitted only to watch and report, not to interfere. In response to questions, INEC officials stated 53 domestic organizations were approved to supply observers, among these the umbrella Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) organization whom many had feared would not be accredited. INEC officials announced that election results will be annulled in any location where violence occurs. As of the end of the first day, no clear method for accreditation had been explained and confusion reigned. Mission observers received accreditation at noon on April 11, however, many groups were still awaiting their accreditation at that time. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Without notice or invitations, INEC held an accreditation briefing for domestic and international observers on April 10-11 at the Abuja Hilton. (NOTE: Post learned of the conference late on April 9 through USAID partners working closely with INEC. There were reports that one TV station aired an announcement on April 9, though most individuals with whom we spoke heard about the briefing through word of mouth.) At the start of the conference, poloffs noted numerous NGO representatives desperately calling colleagues to let them know of the affair. An agenda, hastily passed to a select few attendees halfway through the morning, indicated that the second day of the conference will be a repeat of the first, presumably for those unable to attend the April 10 portion. Poloffs spoke to no less than six INEC representatives on the morning of the first day, but no one could tell us definitively what was needed for accreditation or how it would be done. INEC's Director for International Affairs was able to obtain accreditation materials for the Mission by noon on April 11;

however, the venue was full of domestic observers and some international groups still awaiting their credentials when poloff arrived to pick up Mission credentials.

13. (SBU) INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu, in a presentation to the assembled observers, ran down a scorecard on elections preparations -- giving the INEC a 100 percent. He maintained that INEC had accredited "every credible organization" as observers and cautioned international organizations that "not all that claim to be civil society organizations and NGOs actually are." Iwu also informed observers that the INEC would set up five hotlines in each state and ten in Abuja for observers and the general public to call in and report problems. The hotline numbers are not yet set up, however, and Iwu was not able to give specifics. Chairman of the INEC Election Monitoring and Observation Committee (EMOC) Ekpenyong Nsa gave a brief presentation titled "Election Observation in Nigeria," which contained no information on the elections, but rather focused on chastising observers for not understanding the Nigerian context and provided background on the population, land area, climate, geography and national holidays of Nigeria.

14. (SBU) The presentations were followed by an interactive Q&A session, in which INEC officials listened to several questions and then answered a select few. This was the only portion of the briefing where election procedures and policies were discussed. Officials noted that TMG, an umbrella organization made up of approximately 200 NGOs and civil society groups and funded by USAID partners, was among the 53 organizations approved for accreditation. As well, EMOC Chairman Nsa told observers election results will be nullified in any location where violence occurs. Other items of note include:

-- Voters who appear at polling stations without either a temporary or permanent voter registration card will not be

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allowed to vote. Officials maintained voters who did not receive temporary cards upon registration should report before the elections to their ward elections officer to receive their permanent cards. (COMMENT. This instruction was given at the briefing only. Poloffs are not aware of any public information campaigns educating the public on this procedure. Given that contacts in some areas have reported large percentages of registrants receiving no card or receipt due to malfunctioning printers, there could be significant numbers turned away on election day. END COMMENT.)

-- All election results other than Presidential will be announced by the INEC Returns Officer at the highest level of collation (i.e., State Returns Officers will announce governors, Ward Returns Officers will announce Ward delegates to the State Assemblies, etc.). Only INEC Returns Officers are authorized to announce results. No announcements may be made by television, radio or other sources. INEC Chairman Iwu will announce the winner of the Presidential election.

-- The number of polling stations will remain 120,000 (as in 2003). Polling sites will be at the same locations as 2003. If a polling site has grown to more than 750 people since the 2003 elections, "baby units" will be set up at the polling site to handle the extra people.

-- Results will be transmitted to Abuja both in hard copy and electronically (using GSM cellular technology and the internet).

-- Individuals will not be permitted to remain in the polling stations after voting. No one will be permitted to "loiter" within 300 meters of the polling station. When asked about campaigns urging voters to remain at polling stations to "protect their vote," Nsa chastised, "you must learn to trust us."

-- Polling stations will be open from 8am to 3pm, with all voters who arrive at the station prior to 3pm being permitted to vote.

-- INEC claims to have "looked through" the voters register to weed out underage and multiple registrants. These individuals have been placed on an alternate list and will be required to show proof of age or identity. (COMMENT. There is no national ID card and no information was given on how these individuals will prove either age or identity. END COMMENT.)  
CAMPBELL